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SUBJECT: DJAMEL BEGHAL CONVICTED, RECEIVES 10-YEAR SENTENCE

1. (U) Summary: Djamel Beghal, the ringleader of a group arrested in 2001 on suspicion of planning to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Paris, was convicted March 15 of "terrorist conspiracy," and received a maximum 10-year sentence. His five accomplices were all found guilty as well, and received sentences ranging from one year to nine years in prison. End summary.

2. (U) Beghal was arrested July 28, 2001 at the Dubai airport in the United Arab Emirates. After being questioned by local authorities, he was transferred to France and charged with "terrorist conspiracy." A police and judicial investigation opened September 10, 2001 accused Beghal and five accomplices of planning to attack the U.S. Embassy in Paris with a bomb-laden truck driven by a suicide bomber. The investigation, led by investigating judges Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard, ended in 2004 and the trial of Beghal and his accomplices began at the end of 2004.

3. (U) During the six-week trial, Beghal maintained his innocence, and said a confession he had given in Dubai was coerced by torture. Furthermore, he said the 45,000 page dossier compiled by the terrorist investigating judges was filled with nothing more than proof that Beghal and his five co-defendants were friends. On February 9, the prosecutor requested that Beghal and Kamel Daoudi receive a 10-year sentence, Nabil Bounour and Abdelkrim Lefkir receive eight years, Rachid Benmessahel receive six years and Johan Bonte receive five years. In the decision announced March 15, the judge gave Beghal the maximum ten-year sentence. He gave Daoudi nine years, Bounour and Lefkir six years, Benmessahel three years and Bonte one year. Immediately after the verdict, lawyers for Beghal and Daoudi declared they would appeal. One of Beghal's lawyers, Jean-Alain Michel, said the verdict was a "judicial parody" and "our judicial Guantanamo."

4. (SBU) Comment: Judicial contacts and Embassy observers to the Beghal trial noticed that things were not going well for the ringleader when, from the very beginning, he engaged in frequent (and tense) arguments with the presiding judge. Today's decision is a clear win for the anti-terrorism specialists within the French government. End comment.  
Leach